

**CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)**  
**STATEMENT TO NATIONAL SCIENCE BOARD**  
**December 7, 2005**

Thank you for inviting me to participate in your process to establish a commission on math and science education. I greatly appreciate the extent the Board has consulted with me and my staff both publicly and privately on this matter, and indeed on the full range of issues before the Board.

As you well know, I have long been a supporter of the National Science Foundation in general and its education programs in particular. As I always point out, no step the United States can take – not trade policy or tax policy or defense policy – will secure our future if we do not have a strong educational system at all levels.

The challenges facing our education system have been outlined repeatedly, most recently in the National Academy report, “Rising Above the Gathering Storm,” which was a foundation for the document put out yesterday at the Innovation Summit that I helped organize with Mr. Wolf and Mr. Ehlers.

But the budget of the National Science Foundation (NSF) hardly reflects the ever growing sense of crisis. The Education Directorate at NSF received \$944 million in fiscal year 2004. In fiscal 2005, that number dropped to \$841 million and the Administration’s request for fiscal 2006 was another \$100 million below that. Fortunately, and thanks to the efforts of Chairman Wolf and Congressman Ehlers, among others, approximately \$40 million of that proposed cut was restored. This was a great political achievement, but it hardly made it a banner year for education funding.

Worse still, the funding debate reflects a larger problem – a lack of consensus and understanding about the vital role NSF has played and must play in improving math and science education at all levels. NSF’s peer review processes, its openness to innovation, its connections with higher education, its single-minded focus on, and expertise in science and math, its willingness to evaluate its programs (although that still needs some improving), its stature in the education community, and its focus on excellence as well as equity make NSF a unique and indispensable player in education.

That was true when Congress made education a central part of the NSF mission in 1950 – even before the Sputnik crisis – and it’s equally true today. The question is: How do we broaden the consensus on that, and how do we ensure that NSF is doing the best possible job at fulfilling its mission in a way that capitalizes on its unique roles and strengths?

Those are the questions that need to be the focus of an education commission. I know that there are many who want the education commission to cover the waterfront. And if folks want to have the commission look across the board at education, despite all the reports that are already out there, so be it.

But I will tell you bluntly that the commission will be a waste of time and an unaffordable missed opportunity if it does not provide a very clear, concise and cogent statement of the NSF role in education at all levels, and if it does not provide clear and very specific guidance about what activities NSF should be undertaking to fulfill that role. Your model should be the Neal Commission report on NSF’s undergraduate education, which had an enormous impact on shaping policy in that area.

I understand that to make a clear statement about NSF, a commission will have to know what problems are out there and what other federal, state and local agencies are doing. But that’s

different from having the report focus on those matters. The focus needs to be NSF. That's the Science Board's primary charge – not its only charge, but its most important one and the only one that is not duplicated elsewhere. And it's where the Board has the greatest influence.

So please, please make sure that any commission gives us the specific guidance that the Administration and the Congress need to enable NSF to make the most of its unique capabilities in K-16 education. So much is at stake at this pivotal time. You have the chance to ensure that NSF education programs, and therefore U.S. education, have a brighter future.

And nothing could be more important. As H.G. Wells wrote, "Civilization becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." Thank you.